



GNDR_ST 490/English 481 • Nicholas Davis

Queer Theory and Cinema

"Queer theory" and "New Queer Cinema" were two neologisms born of the same early-1990s moment in Anglophone academia, artistry, and activism. Both saw themselves as extending but also complicating the intellectual, aesthetic, and ideological parameters of prior formations like "gay and lesbian studies" or "LGBT film." These new and spreading discourses stoked each other's productive advances. Scholars developed and illustrated new axioms through the medium of the movies, while filmmakers rooted their stories and images in changing notions of gender performativity, counter-historiography, and coalitional politics. Still, queer theory and queer cinema faced similar skepticisms: did their ornate language and conceptual novelty endow dissident sexualities with newfound political, cultural, and philosophical stature, or did they retreat too far from daily lives, mainstream tastes, and ongoing public emergencies? Did "queer" enable elastic identification and coalition among subjects with a wide range of sexual and gendered identities, or did the term reproduce the demographic and discursive hierarchies it claimed to deconstruct? Was the lack of fixed definitions, consensus ideals, or shared aesthetic practices a boon or a harm in sustaining a long-term movement of art, action, or thought?

This class will explore some decisive shifts as critical theory and narrative film reclaimed "queer" as a boundary-breaking paradigm, in the pivotal era of *Gender Trouble*, *Epistemology of the Closet*, *Tongues Untied*, and *Paris Is Burning*. We will recover scholarly and cinematic trends that laid indispensable groundwork for these queer turns and will also track the subsequent careers of "queer" in the way we perform readings, perceive bodies, record histories, imagine psyches, form alliances, enter archives, and orient ourselves in space and time. Diversities of race, class, and gender identity will constantly inflect our understandings of "queer" and even challenge the presumed primacy of sexuality as the key referent for that term. Participants will develop skills of close-reading films as films and engage nimbly with the overarching claims but also the curious nuances, anomalies, and paradoxes in the scholarship we read. (This seminar satisfies a core requirement toward the Graduate Certificate in Gender & Sexuality Studies.)

University Hall 418 • Th 2:00-4:50pm